

Remarks

1. The independent claims have been amended to recite “*sending a reservation request from the source contact center to each of the contact centers including itself at the same time*” (emphasis added) or similar appropriate wording. Applicant submits that the independent claims so amended are novel and not rendered obvious by the prior art of record for reasons previously argued and summarized below.
2. Knitl discloses that, only if the (source) contact center on which the call arrives does not have a free agent are the other contact centers queried (see flow chart of figure 2). So, on Knitl the reservation request is sent to the other contact centers but not to the (source) contact center that received the call and is only sent to the other contact centers once a determination has been made at the source contact center that there is no agent free at said source contact center. The system of Knitl therefore excludes the source contact center from the subsequent collective routing decision for a contact initiated by sending out the reservation request from the source contact center to all other contact centers excluding itself. Knitl is thus an example of an overflow model of network call routing rather than a virtual call center as defined by claim 1 as amended. Even if it is argued that the source contact center of Knitl does send a reservation request to itself, it certainly does not do so at the same time as sending said request to other contact centers. Knitl teaches against this claim limitation since, it must firstly determine whether it has a free agent (i.e. process the reservation request) before sending the request to other contact centers where the determining is negative. Consequently, claim 1, and by extension the remaining independent claims, of the present application is not anticipated by Knitl.

3. Claim 1 as amended defines a method of routing a contact in a network of contact centers which includes the source node (contact center) in the decision of which is the best agent in the **entire** contact center network, within a certain skillset and intrinsic criteria (e.g. longest idle agent). In other words, when the source contact center sends out the reservation request at the same time to all the contact centers including itself for free agents, it also queries the agents in its own contact center, so that all agents in the entire network can be judged against each other to make the routing decision for a particular contact. This is a useful contribution to the art in that it means that any call that arrives in the entire network of contact centers can be routed to any agent in any contact center in the network, including the contact center that the contact happened to arrive at. Consequently, no possible agent is excluded and all agents are judged for availability etc on the same basis at the same time. The method of claim 1 also allows customers to consider their entire network of contact centers as a "virtual call centre" within which an agent can be physically present at any node but can take incoming calls from any other node. In contrast, in Knitl, only if the contact center on which the call arrives does not have a free agent are the other contact centers queried. Thus, the agents of the source contact center of Knitl are effectively judged by a different standard from those of the other supporting contact centers since Knitl describes an overflow contact handling model that inherently precludes the virtual contact center arrangement of the present invention. Therefore, the method of claim 1 makes a useful contribution to the art. There is nothing in the disclosures of Knitl, Chee or Hurd that teaches or suggests the method of claim 1. Claim 1 is therefore non-obvious in view of these prior art references, whether taken singly or in any combination. The same analysis is applicable to other independent claims of the present application.

4. Claim 7 - This claim describes the concept of making the inter-contact centre routing decision within the bounds of specific skillsets e.g. routing to the longest idle agent in a given skillset. Applicant can find no disclosure of this in Knitl as previously alleged.

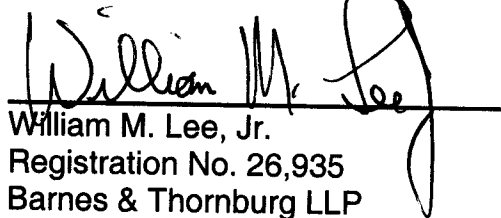
6. Claim 6 - The Examiner has previously rejected this claim on the basis of column 3, lines 40/41 of Knitl. However, the Examiner has confused agent reservation timing as taught by Knitl with the timer at the source contact centre of the present invention which waits for target contact centres to respond with idle/reserved agent notifications (not disclosed by Knitl). Thus, claim 6 is not anticipated by Knitl.

7. In view of the foregoing, favorable consideration of the claims as amended is respectfully requested.

8. An appropriate Petition for Extension of Time is also submitted herewith.

July 20, 2006

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William M. Lee, Jr.", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with a large, looped "L" and "E" at the end.

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